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ELEMENTS FOR A CARTOGRAPHY OF BELONGING TO A GROUP

NONPOLITICS AUTONOMY, COMMUNITY, DELEUZE, DELEUZE/GUATTARI, FUSIONED GROUPS, MARXISM, SPINOZA

The essay we (autonomies) share below is by the brazilian philosopher Peter Pál Pelbart. (In the absence of the original portuguese language version, our translation relies upon a spanish language translation published by lobo suelto!) The exercise undertaken is difficult (to conceptualise a community of the different) and it is by no means clear that the essay succeeds in attaining its goal, however modestly declared. We are however in agreement that it is along some such path that one must travel if we are indeed to think through autonomous ways of life in common.

We could start from Spinoza, the prince of philosophers. And start with the most elementary. What is an individual? Spinoza responds: an individual is defined by her/his degree of potency. Each of us has a unique degree of power, mine is one, yours is another, hers/his is another. But what is a degree of power? It is a certain power to affect and to be affected. Each one of us has it. The power of being affected by a bureaucrat: it is sufficient to read Kafka to have a very clear idea. And the ability to affect and be affected by an artist, what is it? Could it be that that of a dancer is the same as that of an actor or of a politician? Could it be that that of an acrobat is the same as that of someone who fasts? Again Kafka: see, for example, those short stories about artists in *The Hunger Artist*. Although Deleuze likes to give the example of the tick, which fulfills its power to be affected by the three elements, light, odour and blood. It climbs to the highest place of a tree in search of light, then it can wait in fasting for a long time in the immense and silent forest, and when it feels the smell of the mammal that is passing, it lets itself drop, aiming for the skin of the animal and the blood behind it. So, what is a tick? Well, it's a degree of power. It is a certain power to be affected. A tick is defined, ultimately, by those three affects. How to make the cartography of our affections? How to map "ethologically" the affections of an individual, be it a tick or a person? Or a group or a movement?

We are, then, a degree of potentiality, of power, defined by our power to affect and to be affected. But we never know in advance what our power is, what affect we are capable of. It is always an experimental question. We do not yet know what the body is capable of, says Spinoza, we will only discover it in the course of existence. To the taste of encounters. Only through encounters do we learn to select what fits with our body and what does not, what is organised with it, what tends to break it down, what intensifies its force of existing, what diminishes it, what intensifies its power to act, which diminishes it. A good encounter is the one through which my body connects with what is convenient for it, an encounter through which it increases its force of existing,

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its power to act, its joy. We learn to select our encounters, and to compose: it is a great art that of composition, of the selection of good encounters. With what elements, materials, individuals, groups, ideas, is my power composed, to form a greater power, and that generates greater joy? And conversely, what tends to diminish my power, my power to affect and to be affected, what causes me sadness? What is it that separates me from my strength? Sadness is every passion that implies a diminution of our power to act; joy, every passion that increases our power to act. This opens up an important ethical and political problem: how is it that those who hold power make us sad? The sad passions as necessary to the exercise of power. To inspire sad passions: it is the necessary relationship that imposes the priest, the despot, inspires sadness in its subjects, makes them impotent, deprives them of the force of existing. Sadness is not something vague, it is the diminution of the power to act. To exist is, therefore, to vary in our power to act between these two poles, these ups and downs, elevations and falls.

So, how to fill the power to affect and to be affected that corresponds to us? For example, we can simply be affected by the things that surround us, in the encounters that we have by chance to taste, we can be at the mercy of these, passively, and therefore have only passions. Worse yet, these encounters can be just bad encounters, which give us sad passions, hatred, envy, resentment, humiliation, all of which diminish our strength to exist and we find ourselves separated from our power to act. Now, few philosophers fought so ardently the cult of sad passions. What Spinoza means is that passions are not a problem, they exist and are inevitable, they are neither good nor bad, they are necessary for the encounter of bodies and the encounter of ideas. What is avoidable, to a certain extent, are the sad passions that enslave us in impotence. In other words, it is in the joyful passions where we approach that point of conversion where we can stop simply suffering, to be able to do; to stop having only passions, so as to have actions, to be able to unfold in our power to do, our power to affect, our power to be the direct cause of our actions, and not always to obey external causes, suffering them, being always at the mercy of them. As you have already realised, I am on a free and supersonic flight with Spinoza, with pinches of Deleuze, for our specific purposes.

Deleuze insists on the following: nobody knows in advance what affections s/he is capable of, we do not yet know what a body or a soul is capable of, it is a matter of experimentation, but also of prudence. That is the ethological interpretation of Deleuze: ethics would be a study of the compositions, of the composition between relations, of the composition among powers, of the modes of existence in which this or that compound is derived. It is not a matter of following any command, previous primer, or prescription, but of evaluating the ways of life that result from this or that composition, from this or that encounter, from this or that affectation. If the individual is defined by her/his power to affect and to be affected, to compose itself, the question necessarily expands beyond the individual, and concerns the range of her/his encounters. How relationships can be composed to form a new, "broader" relationship, or how the powers to affect and to be affected can be compounded to constitute a more intense power, a more "intense" potentiality. It is accordingly, says Deleuze, about "sociabilities and communities". And he even asks: "How are individuals composed to form a superior individual, to infinity? How can a being lead another to her/his world, while preserving or respecting those very relationships and one's own world?" It is a crucial question, not only for those who work in a group, but for life in general. How can one compose oneself with another, attract her/him to her/his world, while preserving or respecting the relationships and the world specific to that other? As if there could be several worlds, even within a larger composition, without all being reduced to one and the same world. From there, one can think about the constitution of a multiple "body". For example, a collective would be that, a multiple body, composed of several individuals, with their specific relations of slowness and diligence. A collective could be thought of as that continuous variation between its heterogeneous elements, as a reciprocal affectation between singular powers, in a certain composition of slowness and diligence.

But how to think about the consistency of this "ensemble" composed of singularities, of multiplicity, of heterogeneous elements? Deleuze and Guattari frequently invoke a "plane of consistency", a "plane of composition", a "plane of immanence". In a compositional plane, it is about accompanying the variable connections, the relations of slowness and diligence, the anonymous and impalpable matter dissolving forms and people, strata and subjects, liberating movements, extracting particles and affects. It is a plane of proliferation, of habitation and contagion. On a plane of composition, what is at stake is the consistency with which it manages to gather heterogeneous, disparate elements, and also how it favors multiple events.

As the virtually unintelligible conclusion of a *Thousand Plateaus* states, what is inscribed in a compositional plane are events, incorporeal transformations, nomadic essences, intensive variations, becomings, smooth spaces: it is always a body without organs. In any case, there is a condition here that serves to think through the micropolitical or macropolitical plane, and in the guise of what appears to be a mathematical formula: N-1. What does that peculiarity mean? Only this. Given any multiplicity, a set of individuals, or singularities, or affects, how can a plane of consistency be produced without subsuming that heterogeneity to some unity? That is, the challenge consists in that: submerged in some multiplicity, how to make the plane of composition conjure away the One that pretends to unify the whole or speak in the name of that multiplicity, be that one the pope, a ruler, the director, an ideology, a predominant affect. It is about rejecting the empire of the One. It is a philosophy of difference, of multiplicity, of singularity, which does not mean Chaos, non-differentiation, anything goes, but just the opposite, affectation, composition, a kind of constructivism, where the only rule, beyond all that chemistry of encounters, and of consistency, is to excommunicate the one who claims to speak on behalf of all, or who believes her/himself to be the representative of a totality that must be avoided at all costs.

Multitude is the opposite of mass. The mass is a homogeneous compact, a non-differentiation of its components in a single direction, subject to a leader. The multitude, as Negri understands it, is the opposite, it is that heterogeneity, that collective

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intelligence, those reciprocal affectations, that subjective multiplicity. Basically, and that's where I wanted to go, the multitude is a certain dynamic between the common and the singular, the multiplicity and the variation, excessive power and the sovereign power that tries to contain it, regulate it or mould it - and maybe a theater, performance, or intervention group, could be considered under the same logic, in that dynamic between the common and the singular, composition and consistency, the event and subjectivity. Basically, in these compositions and re-compositions, it is always the immanent experimentation of a commons, it is always about the invention of ways of life, it is always a redistribution of the affections, it is always about the invention of new possibilities. How to think then the community, or the group, or a collective, not according to the model of fusion, of homogeneity, of identity with itself, but of heterogeneity, of plurality, of play, even of reinvented distances inside? In other words, as Blanchot says in La Communauté Inavouable, in the community it is no longer a relation of the Same with the Same, but of a relation in which the Other intervenes, and this is always irreducible, always in dis-symmetry, it introduces the dis-symmetry. As Bataille says: "If this world were not constantly traversed by the convulsive movements of the beings who seek each other (...), it would seem a derision directed at those to whom it gives birth". But what is this convulsive movement of the beings that look for each other? Would it be love, as when talking about the community of lovers? Or desire, according to Negri? Or is it a movement that does not tolerate any name, neither love nor desire, but attracts beings to throw them towards others, according to their bodies or according to their heart and their thinking, snatching them from ordinary society, reinventing their sensitivity? That this topic is more than an individual obsession of an author is demonstrated by its recurring presence among thinkers of the sixties and seventies. For example, in a course given at the Collège de France in 1976-77, Roland Barthes talks about the question of Comment vivre-ensemble (How to live together), which was the theme of the Biennial that year. Barthes is not interested in the conjugal life-of-two, nor in living-with-many according to a collectivist coercion, but in the challenge of "putting distances in common", "the utopia of a socialism of distances", echoing the "pathos of distance" evoked by Nietzsche. They are new forms of collective agency that are emerging, not fused, but rhizomatic. In this vein, resistance itself assumes new modalities. Deleuze never tires of repeating: to create is to resist. To resist is not just to say no, but is to invent, reinvent, to create new effects, new precepts, new possibilities, new possibilities of life. Of course, the very term "creation" is now compromised, and completely subject to the dictates of late capitalism and the society of control, with its insatiable vampirism, which seizes social vitality like no other previous regime had. But at the same time, in that context, such vitality ends up appearing as what it is, not a product of capital, but the patrimony of everyone and anyone, the power of the common person. Even desertion assumes new forms. Speaking of Melville's Bartleby, the clerk who responds to everything with "I would prefer not to", Deleuze comments: the particularity of that man is that he has no particularity, he is any man, a man without an essence, the man who refuses to fix himself in a stable personality. Unlike the servile bureaucrat (who comprises the Nazi mass, for example), in the common man, as he appears here, something more is manifest than expressionless anonymity: it is a call for a new community. This is not a community based on hierarchy, paternalism, compassion, as Bartleby's employer would like to offer him, but a society of brothers, the "community of celibates". Deleuze detects among Americans, even before independence, that vocation to constitute a society of brothers, a federation of men and goods, a community of anarchist individuals in the heart of universal immigration. The North American pragmatist philosophy, in consonance with the American literature that Deleuze so valued, will struggle not only against the particularities that pit man against man and feed an irremediable distrust between one and another, but also struggle against its opposite, the Universal or the Totality, the fusion of souls in the name of great love or charity, the collective soul in the name of which the inquisitors spoke, as in the famous passage by Dostoevsky, and sometimes among revolutionaries.

Deleuze then asks: what is left to souls when they no longer hold to particularities, what prevents them from merging into a whole? Their originality remains, that is to say, a sound that each emits when he puts her/his foot down upon the road, when he leads his life without seeking salvation, when he embarks on his incarnated journey without any particular objective, and then finds the other traveler, whom he recognizes by the sound. Lawrence said that this was the new messianism or the democratic contribution of American literature: against the European morality of salvation and charity, a morality of life where the soul is only realized by setting foot out on the road, exposed to all contacts, without ever trying to save other souls, deviating from those that emit too authoritarian or too tearful a sound, forming with their equals agreements and accords, even elusive ones. The community of the cellibates is that of any man and their singularities that cross paths: it is neither individualism nor communalism.

I would not want to finish this zigzagging journey with an overly assertive conclusion, because we are at such a complex moment that assertiveness can become one more fundamentalist ingredient that combines with many others, such as the religion of capital or the capital of religions. Experimentation is always more hesitant, made up of gaps and disparities, collapses and resumptions, failures, hesitations, unusual happenings, events that are all the more imponderable the less they are exhibited according to the thresholds of perception consecrated by a society of spectacle. Maybe I would like to say just the following, as a closing. Deleuze goes on to say that what matters to him is not the future of revolution, but the becoming-revolutionary of the people, the space-times they are capable of inventing, the events that take place everywhere. So, as he says, being on the Left does not mean a partisan belonging, but a question of perception. When they think of May 68, Deleuze and Guattari were referring to a mutation in sensibility, in social perception, in which suddenly everything that was endured on a daily basis became intolerable and new desires that previously seemed unthinkable were invented. A social mutation is a redistribution of affects, it is a redrawing of the border between what a society perceives as intolerable and what it considers desirable. I do not believe that theater is alien to this task, which is that of sensitivity, perception, the invention of possible, unusual forms of association, modes of existence. It is an aesthetic, ethical, political, subjective challenge. But that does not happen in an ethereal or abstract way. Sometimes we need very specific devices that support such experimentation, such events. To be up to what happens to us is the

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only possible ethic, to be up to the events that one is in a position to render possible, in the most diverse fields, on the most diverse scales, molar and molecular, rejecting biopolitical nihilism and its increasingly insidious and capillary forms. These diverse apparatuses, of which a certain theater is a part, I would call them biopolitical apparatuses, where a potentiality or power of life, a bio-power, is at stake.

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